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THE SECRETARY OF STATE

WASHINGTON

June 17, 1980

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Dear Adlai:

Thank you for your letter of May 29, 1980, which referred to the recently-published book, Assault on the Liberty, and the charges of its author, James M. Ennis, Jr., that the Israeli attack on the vessel by Israeli forces was deliberate.

As you point out, questions about this incident have arisen frequently over the years. In particular, the charge that Israel deliberately attacked the Liberty has been raised a number of times. In examining these charges, it is necessary to begin by recognizing that, as with all wars, the Six-Day War was a period of frenetic activity and great confusion. After the attack, the Government of Israel immediately took full responsibility for the attack and stated that it was due to an error on the part of its armed forces.

In the aftermath of the attack, the Israelis went to the aid of the disabled ship, extended immediate apologies for the attack, and paid compensation to the families of the dead and wounded. In a subsequent inquiry, a Navy Court concluded that it had insufficient information to make a judgment on the reasons why Israeli aircraft and motor torpedo boats attacked the Liberty.

In addition to paying in full the claims submitted by the U.S. Government in connection with the deaths and injuries to the Liberty crew, the Government of Israel has agreed to negotiate compensation for the physical damage to the Liberty. We expect to begin

The Honorable
Adlai Stevenson,
United States Senate.

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these negotiations soon, and are presently completing consultations with the Department of the Treasury and the Department of the Navy to reach a comprehensive US negotiating position.

As regards the other concerns raised in your letter, we have consistently made clear in public statements and in private representations to the Israeli Government our position regarding Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and its actions in southern Lebanon. We will continue to do so as the circumstances require and in no sense do we acquiesce in those policies. As you are aware, I raised the settlements issue in my June 9 address to the Washington Press Club. I do not believe, however, that a re-examination of our relationship with Israel as you suggest is necessary.

I want to assure you that the Administration remains fully committed to the achievement of a comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on Resolutions 242 and 338 and the Camp David Accords. Moreover, we remain convinced that Prime Minister Begin is firmly committed to achieving the Camp David goal of a comprehensive, just and durable peace. Israel's security and confidence in its ability to defend itself are essential elements of this quest for peace, and in this spirit our security assistance to Israel is a fundamental component of our Middle East policy.

We are pleased that Egypt and Israel have agreed to send their Heads of Delegation, Minister Burg and Foreign Minister Ali, to meet with Ambassador Linowitz in the near future to prepare for resumption of the autonomy negotiations. The successful conclusion of those negotiations remains the most realistic prospect for moving forward towards a resolution of the Middle East conflict.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Edmund S. Muskie

ADLAI E. STEVENSON
ILLINOIS

P800 73-0694

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

May 29, 1980

FADRC
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

ACTIO
is assigned

NEF

The Honorable Edmund S. Muskie
Secretary of State
Department of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The May 28 Washington Post contained a report of an eye-witness account of the Israeli attack on the U.S.S. Liberty during the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. The account, which appears in the recently published book Assault on the Liberty by James M. Ennes, Jr., purports to cite documentary evidence that the attack by Israeli armed services was deliberate and not the result of mistaken identity as the Israeli government has consistently asserted.

Questions about the attack on the Liberty have recurred frequently since 1967. There have been doubts about the explanation of the Israeli government and some puzzlement over its seeming reluctance to settle U.S. claims even after so many years. I had occasion to write to Secretary Vance on this subject, but I cannot say that I ever received a satisfactory reply.

If there is any basis in fact to the Ennes version of the Liberty incident, it would raise additional questions about the U.S. policy of supplying massive economic and military aid to Israel. To judge this policy, the Administration should address in detail the allegations contained in the Ennes account and in earlier reports that Israel acted deliberately in attacking the Liberty and that the U.S. Government, though aware of this, withheld the truth from the American people.

The Israeli attack upon a U.S. ship, its use of U.S. arms in reprisals against southern Lebanon, and its settlement policy in the West Bank, all in defiance of U.S. policy, if not U.S. law, require some reconsideration of our support for this country. I question whether the U.S. can maintain its authority in the world by acquiescing in such defiant actions and, indeed, providing a substantial amount of the resources that make them possible. The appointment of the new Israeli Minister of Defense is not reassuring. Does the Administration acquiesce in actions which

Sincerely,

Adlai E. Stevenson

by its own admission undermine the Camp David accords and are repudiated by Israelis of high rank and great stature? If not, how can it justify continued support for the Begin regime?

I suggest the U.S.-Israeli relationship needs to be examined in the light of all these factors, with some reference to the accuracy of the Post story.

With best wishes,

Sincerely,

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

S/S

June 12, 1980

UNCLASSIFIED

TO: The Secretary

FROM: NEA - Harold H. Saunders HS(3)

SUBJECT: Letter from Senator Stevenson

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

On May 29, 1980, Senator Adlai Stevenson sent you a letter (Tab B), citing James M. Ennes, Jr.'s recent book, Assault on the Liberty, and suggesting that the U.S. examine Ennes' charges that the Israeli attack was deliberate. He also suggested that in view of Ennes' allegations, and Israel's activities in the West Bank and Southern Lebanon, the U.S. reconsider its support for Israel.

Ennes' charge that the Israeli attack was deliberate is not new, and has been carefully examined in the past. The Navy Board of Inquiry into the incident concluded that it had insufficient information to make a judgment on why the attack occurred.

In the draft at Tab A, this point is made. The draft also points out that we have made our views well known on Israel's actions in the West Bank and Lebanon. In conclusion, we suggest that now is not the time for a reexamination of our relationship with Israel.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the letter at Tab A.

Attachments:

Tab A - Letter to Senator Stevenson.
Tab B - Letter from Senator Stevenson.

Drafted:NEA/IAI:JFScott:mgk
6/11/80 x23672

Cleared:NEA/IAI:JLHirsch
NEA:MDraper
H:PBurleigh

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